



SUBMISSION TO:

THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S
NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION
RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED
AREAS

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1.0 THE CAMPERVAN AND MOTORHOME CLUB OF AUSTRALIA (CMCA)

The CMCA, with over 45 000 members, is the peak representative body for the Motorhome and Campervan market and the largest consumer voice for the sector as a whole. It was formed in April 1986 and is based in Newcastle NSW.

The Motorhome and Self-contained Vehicle Market (MSV) encompasses those travellers carrying the most self contained forms of accommodation. These range from converted light trucks to luxury purpose built vehicles. MSV travellers tend to be retired pensioners, travelling in twos and making average trips of 157 days per year on the road. They stay in caravan parks, rest areas and parks at an average of 1 night at a caravan park to 2.7 nights elsewhere (CMCA 2005:6).

The MSV segment is becoming increasingly apparent as a niche market in its own right. In the year ending December 2004, domestic MSV visitors numbered 122 000 and spent 1.643 million visitor nights in Australia (CMCA 2005:6). This group spends considerably more time on holiday than other camping visitors and their overall spend is high (\$9-10000 per vehicle) (CMCA 2005:6). Rest area stopovers are likely to generate at least \$80 per vehicle spending at nearby shopping facilities during a stay and in major towns around \$385 per vehicle on goods and services (CMCA 2005:6).

The self sufficiency of this group together with modern communications and technology is increasing the ability of this sector to travel to remote areas (e.g. GPS, internet and solar energy) and this segment is responsible for significant domestic visitation and spending in regional areas, particularly in off peak periods.

The CMCA has been proactively conducting research, auditing infrastructure and engaging with a range of stakeholders including industry and community groups, local, state and federal governments, and manufacturers and suppliers to increase awareness of industry and infrastructure providers of the value and needs of the MSV market. An Issues Paper detailing the nature and needs of the market, key issues and recommendations for increasing and capturing this domestic revenue is attached to this submission and provides the source for all references in this document.

2.0 CMCA COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

CMCA has undertaken several initiatives to minimise the environmental impacts of member activities and vehicles and to assist in maintaining the integrity of environmental areas in which they camp.

2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

CMCA's environmental policy encourages members to:

- leave rest areas and overnight stopping spots cleaner than when they arrive;
- use bio-degradable toilet chemicals and avoid using those with toxic-based additives;
- use designated dump points to dispose of wastes; and
- upgrade vehicles to be totally self-contained for power and black and grey water.

The club is also currently working with natural resource department specialists to implement weed control and wash down procedures to limit weed transference by vehicles.

2.2 SELF CONTAINMENT CERTIFICATION AND WASTE

CMCA has developed a Self-containment Certification Scheme, whereby vehicles are assessed according to their capacity to hold fresh, grey and black water and garbage waste. Each vehicle is certified for a number of days depending on their holding capacity. Certification also includes a written undertaking from the Member that the vehicle will be operated in such a way as to ensure that it has no impact on the environment.

This scheme is currently being presented to a wide range of government bodies, with the goal to have Members gain access to areas otherwise not available to them, based on their high level of self containment and minimal environmental footprint.

Under another innovative policy developed by CMCA, the Club will contribute \$1,000 towards the provision of purpose designed 'dump points' which enable MSV users to dispose of black and grey water directly into town sewage systems. Under this initiative CMCA is able to address the issue of waste management and reinforce its' environmental codes which call for no free disposal of waste.

2.3 PROMOTING HOST COMMUNITY BENEFITS

CMCA has encouraged members to support businesses in those regions that offer alternative camping options, often in scenic open space public areas, as well as commercial caravan parks or private landholders that offer accommodation sites that meet the needs of campervan and motorhome travellers.

The CMCA encourages members through articles in *The Wanderer* (the club magazine) and on its website to respect conditions placed on the use of public areas as well as to be environmentally and socially responsible. Recently, it has encouraged a self regulation process within the membership whereby complaints of bad behavior by members are followed up by the CMCA and where appropriate offenders may have their membership suspended.

2.4 CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

The CMCA has also established a partnership with the Keep Australia Beautiful Council in South Australia where CMCA members have been involved in outback clean up and monitoring of rest areas.

There are significant opportunities for the development of partnerships between the CMCA and protected area managers - members can provide a mobile workforce of paid or volunteer labour for conservation research, monitoring and management in a range of protected areas to which they have camping access.

2.5 INTEGRATED CODE OF PRACTICE

The CMCA is currently developing an integrated booklet for members that will place all environmental and social codes of conduct, together with the Self-Containment certification under the one umbrella. In this way members who join the CMCA will be exposed to a full range of practices that contribute to the sustainability of the MSV niche.

3.0 CMCA NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

MSV travellers have been pigeonholed by some as part of a homogenous caravan and camping sector whose needs may be adequately serviced by the caravan park industry alone. However, infrastructure providers need to recognise that the needs of this segment, while overlapping with those of other campers in the broader caravan and camping sector, are not identical. The key camping requirements for MSV travellers include:

- level and accessible sites;
- a degree of open space;
- flexible booking arrangements;
- safe and secure locations;
- water points;
- waste dump points; and
- costs reflecting the level of services and infrastructure required.

In particular, CMCA members are looking for camping options in quiet and natural surroundings, with minimal facilities and crowding. The current trend in caravan parks is quite the opposite, as they move towards servicing higher yield markets and providing a greater number of services in a higher density accommodation environment. In addition, the accommodation network as a whole, does not offer a consistent diversity in camping products within and across regions (that is a mix of low service provision locations, as well as medium to high service provision locations). Hence there is a continuing and increasing demand from the MSV market for alternative low service accommodation options.

These low service alternative accommodation options may be met through the development of appropriate camping systems:

- on private property;
- in rest areas, showgrounds and dedicated parks; and
- in, or adjacent to, national parks, protected areas and other public and private conservation reserves.

CMCA recognises several challenges to the development of these systems including:

- Public liability issues;
- The need to manage use and numbers to protect the amenity and integrity of these areas for all users;
- The difficulty in controlling both abuse of management controls and the activities of other segments of the camping and caravan market (for example, overstays in public rest areas; dumping of waste; use of isolated power boxes and keeping untidy and/or noisy camp areas); and
- Safety and quality assurance issues.

The primary objective of the CMCA is to advocate and negotiate with sector stakeholders to develop the infrastructure and services required to meet the demands of its members. As part of this objective, CMCA aims to encourage the development of an integrated Australia wide network of a variety of accommodation options including the use of public, private and commercial camping facilities. These camping systems need to be consistent and practical in terms of access, use and payment procedures.

4.0 NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION RESERVES

CMCA has a strong interest in issues associated with the establishment, resourcing and management of Australia's National Parks and other protected areas. In general terms, supporting sustainable recreational activity in these areas is particularly important:

- in attracting domestic and international tourism expenditure which provides a source of revenue for conservation management and for regional and surrounding economies;
- to improve environmental awareness and concern regarding the importance of conserving these areas;
- to improving physical health and well being from nature based interactions and activities; and
- to engender a sense of ownership and connection to Australia's natural areas and assets.

For CMCA members in particular, these areas add significant value to their travelling experience; and are particularly attractive as alternative low service accommodation sites. It is particularly important for members that National Parks and other protected areas continue to be low key, natural and non commercial areas accessible to all members of the public.

However currently, access to these areas is delivered to the market via often impractical arrangements which lack consistency and coordination within and across the states. A summary of camping access and conditions in each of the states is provided below.

4.1 QUEENSLAND

There are 5 types of land based protected areas in Queensland managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service including: 7 Scientific National Parks, 227 National Parks, 184 Conservation Parks, 36 Resource Reserves and 421 state forests. The following conditions apply to camping:

- 25 of the 140 protected areas that allow camping provide for motorhome camping - 10 of these are state forests.

- Information on which protected areas are accessible for vehicles can be obtained by internet.
- Sites may be booked and paid by phone or internet, at the customer service centre in Brisbane, or in the customer service centres in the locality where parks are situated. Sites may be booked up to 12months in advance.
- Information on costs may be found on the web and average about \$4 per person per night plus a \$10 park use fee.
- Payment of fees is required when bookings are made. Bookings more than 4 weeks ahead can be paid by cheque in the post.
- Maximum stay is 22 days although shorter periods apply in some parks. You need to phone to obtain this information.

4.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

There are 6 types of land based protected areas in New South Wales managed by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service – 170 national parks, 397 nature reserves, 11 Aboriginal areas, 15 historic sites, 82 conservation areas and 12 regional parks. The following conditions apply to camping in vehicles:

- 60 of these protected areas provide for vehicle based camping, though you need to phone to find out if you can camp with a Motorhomes.
- Information on which parks are accessible for vehicles can be obtained by internet, though you need to call the park to find out about size limitations.
- Information on costs may be found on the web and range from \$0 to \$15 per site.
- 47 of the national parks require a daily entry fee (\$3 to \$22 per vehicle) for visiting with a vehicle though this fee does not apply if you are staying overnight in which case you only pay the camping fee.
- Sites can only be booked by phone or onsite. It is recommended bookings be made in advance. Payment systems vary some over the phone and some require a cheque sent in advance.

There are also 800 State forests run by NSW Parks and Wildlife Service which allow camping and all of these allow vehicle camping. There are no bookings taken and no camping costs. The maximum stay varies for the different parks and a phone call to the park in question needs to be made to confirm details.

There is one national park in NSW run by the Commonwealth Government:

- This park allows for all types of camping, with a maximum stay of 3 weeks.
- Information on which parks are accessible for vehicles can be obtained by internet including size limits.
- Information on costs may be found on the web and range from \$14 to \$27 per site plus a \$10 park use fee.
- Sites can be booked up to 4 months in advance. They can be booked by phone, email or the local visitor centre and full payment must be made on arrival.

4.3 VICTORIA

There are 5 types of land based protected areas in Victoria: 36 national parks, 83 regional parks, 3 wilderness parks, 31 state parks and 3000 state managed crown reserves.

- 30 of these protected areas allow camping, 11 of which (only national parks) allow motorhome camping.
- Information on which parks are accessible for vehicles can be obtained by internet, though size limit/access information specific to motorhomes need to be made by phone.
- Sites may be booked and paid onsite, by phone or at the local visitor centre. Some parks require camping permits which can be purchased from the local park visitor centre or the campground. No bookings are taken and are distributed on a first in first served basis. 5 parks require bookings all year round which can be made up to 12 months in advance.
- Information on costs may only be found by phone and range from \$0 per night to \$10pp per night. Some parks also have entry fees which are paid on arrival.
- Maximum stay is around 6 weeks, though this may vary and needs to be confirmed by phone to the park in question.

4.4 TASMANIA

Tasmania's park agency manages 8 types of land based protected areas in addition to its world heritage areas: 19 national parks, 70 nature reserves, 12 game reserves, 60 state reserves, 178 conservation areas, 23 nature recreation areas, 21 regional reserves and 29 historic sites. Camping conditions are as follows:

- 17 protected areas are available for camping (national parks and conservation areas only), 12 of which allow for vehicle based camping. This information can be found online.
- There are no entry fees and no bookings taken for conservation areas that allow camping and costs are between \$2.20 and \$4 pp per night.
- There is a fee for entry to national parks – for 1 day this is \$15-\$20 per vehicle. There are several multi passes (eg annual and all parks passes) available and senior's concessions for these. Applications for these multi passes can be made online or purchased on the Spirit of Tasmania or visitor centres. All cost information can be found online.
- No bookings are taken for most national parks and camping costs are available online. These range between \$0 to \$10 pp per night. Some parks have ballot systems for very busy periods.

4.5 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Department of Environment and Heritage manages 7 types of protected areas: 18 National Parks, 216 Conservation Parks, 5 Wilderness Protection Areas, 10 Game Reserves, 7 Regional Reserves, 12 Recreation Parks, and 48 Conservation reserves. Camping conditions are as follows:

- 21 protected areas are available for camping and 11 provide for vehicle based camping. Accessible parks can be identified online.
- Most parks do not take bookings and sites are allocated on a first come first served basis. Costs range from \$4 to \$19 per site and payment is made on arrival.
- Some parks require a park fee (\$5.50 - \$7) at the entrance, which does not include a camping fee. For some parks a park pass (\$22 - \$99) can be purchased online, by phone or at national park offices, for an additional charge this pass includes camping.
- The maximum stay is 5 nights per camp site.

4.6 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Western Australia has 4 types of land based protected areas managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management: National Parks, Regional Parks, Conservation Parks, and State Forest Recreation Areas. Camping conditions are as follows:

- There are 45 protected areas where camping is allowed and 21 of these provide for vehicle camping. There is no camping in regional parks protected area car parks. Parks accessible for vehicles can be found by internet.
- Camping costs may be found on the internet and range from \$5 to \$9 per person per night.
- Park entry fees (applicable to 24 parks) can be found online and cost around \$3 concession per vehicle to \$9 non concession for a day pass. Park entry fees are payable on site but a variety of extended passes can be purchased at local visitor centres also.
- No booking or payment information is available online. Sites may be booked by phone and paid on arrival.
- No indication of maximum stay is available online. Maximum stay is 3 days.

4.7 NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Northern Territory has 13 types of protected areas run by the Territory Parks agency: 21 Conservation Reserves; 9 Conservation Areas; 13 Historical Reserves; 19 National Parks; 12 Nature parks; 2 Recreation parks; 2 Coastal Reserves; 1 Desert park; 2 Protection Areas; 1 Reserve; 1 Management Area; 2 Wildlife parks; 1 Hot Springs park. Camping conditions are as follows:

- 28 of these protected areas allow camping, 8 of which allow vehicle based camping.
- Information on which parks are accessible for vehicles/caravans can be obtained by internet.
- No bookings are taken; sites are paid cash on arrival or in an honesty box, first come first served basis.
- Information on costs may be found by internet and average \$6.60 pp per night.
- There are no park entry fees or maximum stays.

The Commonwealth runs 2 national parks in the Northern Territory, one of which allows camping and this park provides sites for vehicles. Camping conditions are as follows:

- There is a maximum stay of 3 weeks.
- Information on which areas in the park are accessible for caravans can be obtained by internet.
- Information on costs must be obtained by phone. There are no park entry fees in general and camping is free without showers or around \$5.40 pp with access to showers.
- No bookings are taken; sites are allocated on a first come first served basis.
- Payment is made on arrival.

The information gathered in the above state by state outline of camping conditions is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – Summary of Camping Conditions

| | Commonwealth | QLD | NSW | VIC | TAS | SA | WA | NT |
|---|--|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Protected Areas That Allow Camping | 2 | 140 (16% of total number of protected areas) | Unknown | 30 (1%) | 17 (4%) | 21 (6.5%) | 45 | 28 (33%) |
| Protected Areas That Allow Motorhome Camping | 2 | 25 (3% of total areas that allow camping) | 60 (9%) | 11 (0.3%) *** | 12 (3%) | 11 (3.5%) | 21 | 8 (9%) |
| Average Camping Costs per person | \$16 | \$4 | \$7.50 | \$5 | \$5 | \$10 | \$7 | \$6.60 |
| National Park Entry Fee | \$10(additional to camping fee) in NSW, free in NT | Free to all parks except Fraser, Moreton and Bribie Islands – access fee is \$33.45) | \$3 - \$22** | for some parks \$4.10 - \$67.50 | \$15-\$20 | Park fee \$5.50 - \$7 (excludes camping fee) Park pass \$22 - \$99 (additional charge for camping) | \$3-\$9 | no entry fee to territory parks |
| Bookings Possible (yes/no/required) | Yes in NSW, no in NT | yes | Required | Yes**** | no | yes | yes | no |
| How to book* (online/ on site) | Online | online/onsite | Onsite | onsite/local/visitor/centre | booking not required. | booking not required | booking not required | booking not required |
| Payment (form/where) | Cash | phone/cash/cheque | phone/cash/cheque | phone/cash | cash | cash | cash | Cash |
| Maximum Stay | 3 weeks | 22 days | no limit | 6 weeks | 5 nights | 5 nights | 3 days | no limit |

* always by telephone

** does not apply when staying overnight

*** only national parks

****excluding 5 parks which require bookings all year round

4.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CAMPERVAN AND MOTORHOME TRAVELLERS

Campervan and motorhome travellers do not recognise state boundaries, they often travel with largely unplanned itineraries and will cover a number of states/territories throughout their journey. The plethora of policies and differing permit/booking systems applying across the states creates a major barrier to use by MSV vehicles.

Campervan and motorhome travellers are on the road for long periods of time and value the flexibility and spontaneity in travel decisions afforded by their largely self contained vehicles. However, the size of vehicles and long term mobility does impose certain requirements that should be considered in protected area planning and management. In particular these relate to campground infrastructure and facilities, information methods and signage and booking policies.

4.8.1 INFORMATION

While the capacity to use onboard computer-based booking has significant potential for the future, this option is only available to a very small proportion of the current campervan and motorhome market. Cost, lack of familiarity with the technology and lack of coverage for networks precludes many MSV users from using email and the internet onboard at this stage.

Alternatively, campervan and motorhome users can go online at visitor information centres and other facilities such as internet cafes and this trend is growing.

Campervan and motorhome travellers can access information online in most cases to identify which protected areas allow camping and, in most cases, the level of fees and any other associated policies, such as ability to have pets and maximum length of stay. While users can search park by park to identify which parks accommodate caravans, this process can take time, and there is no guarantee that a caravan site will be able to accommodate a campervan or motorhome. Only the Commonwealth national parks have an online system where users can confirm size restrictions and motorhome/campervan accessibility. Few online sources or camping information brochures provide a mechanism to sort by vehicle size/type and to locate parks that can accommodate motorhomes. Consequently each park must be phoned individually in advance.

4.8.2 BOOKINGS, PERMITS AND PAYMENT

Four states take bookings, with some parks requiring advance bookings, while 3 states operate on a primarily first come first served basis. In peak periods some parks run a ballot system. In Queensland users can check for availability and book and pay online, but in the other states where bookings are taken, availability can only be determined by phoning park to park. Again there is little consistency between and often within states.

In some cases payment is required in advance and in others payment can only be made onsite – some flexibility or consistency is required here. Some payment systems are particularly impractical for the long term, long distance mobile traveller. For example, in some parks camping permits need to be ordered and paid for by phone or online and then the permit is sent out by post, which is a problem if the user is away from their home base for months at a time.

4.8.3 PHYSICAL ACCESS

Access roads to protected areas, particularly in regional and remote areas are often in disrepair and can be dangerous and difficult to travel on in larger vehicles such as motorhomes and campervans. While there can be no expectation that remote roads will offer the same standards as major highways, and indeed MSV users often avoid such highways, there is a case for maintaining access roads to agreed minimum all weather standards, particularly in areas servicing key national parks.

A review of State and Territory websites reveals that there is little information regarding the physical access of campervans and motorhome into parks. Questions such as turning circle radii at turn around points, clearance heights, parking bays etcetera are left unanswered. There is little information online or in brochures that details these aspects for campervan and motorhome travellers and yet they are critical questions – particularly if the user is manoeuvring a large vehicle.

4.8.4 CAMPING AND ENTRY COSTS

The costs of camping vary a great deal between and within states and park entry fees vary considerably between states and across different types of protected areas.

If a park access fee in addition to camping fees are required then camping in protected areas becomes quite expensive, considering campervan and motorhome travellers are largely self contained and have a minimal environmental footprint.

Some concessions on entry fees are available in some states for seniors and some offer passes that allow multiple visits to one park over a period of time or access to several parks within a state over a period of time. These are considered practical systems.

4.8.5 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Disposal of black and grey water from campervans, motorhomes and self-contained caravans is an important environmental management consideration. CMCA has a very active campaign and environmental management program designed to encourage members to install and maintain best practice standard waste management systems onboard their vehicles. Under this policy MSVs carrying 'self-containment' certification leave no waste behind at national park camping grounds. This applies to black and grey water. It is also CMCA policy for members to take out their solid waste and dispose of at town refuse facilities. However, if there are not appropriate disposal points available in local towns then there is a risk that inappropriate waste disposal will occur.

5.0 PRIVATE RESERVES

Private nature conservancies are increasingly taking a role in the protection of Australia's landscapes. Without access to public funding the organisations which own and manage these reserves require revenue sources. While philanthropic donations can partially sustain such reserves, income from sources such as recreation and tourism use could be important contributors. The campervan and motorhome market offers a range of opportunities for managers of private nature conservancies:

- Income generation from the provision of bush camping and semi developed camping sites (eg access roads, turn-around points, levelled camping pads, waste dump points, access to power);
- Assistance in conservation projects in return for camping access; and
- Provision of paid conservation work – a source of a self-contained workforce.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parks and protected area managers should recognise the changes that have occurred over time to camping and broaden the range of camping opportunities available. Today, tent based camping is only a small component of the total camping picture. There is a need for more camping areas that facilitate the MSV market. Such facilitation does not necessarily require significant infrastructure – indeed the MSV market is significantly less reliant on facilities than traditional camping pursuits.
- There is a need to service the information needs of the MSV market through brochures and online forms, signage etc. and that spell out opportunities for the MSV market and specific issues such as accessibility, size limitations, and facilities. Given the remote locations of many of the parks it would be considerably more convenient if pre-trip and pre-arrival information was available. Similarly many of the existing brochures may indicate camping availability but do not provide specific information as to the style of camping that is facilitated. Related to this point is the issue of maintaining communication with the MSV market. MSV users spend significant time away from their home base and therefore cannot be contacted through traditional postage services. Similarly MSV users access to the internet and email is very patchy – due to the lack of coverage and the fact that many MSV users are not computer literate. Over time, with improvements in technology and the growth of computer literacy this situation will improve, but in the short to medium term it remains an issue.
- The incorporation of a motorhome and campervan symbol/icon into the set of information symbols used by park agencies online, on maps and in brochures that indicated suitable roads and camping sites for camping vehicles larger than caravans would be very useful.
- Consistency in processes for identifying the availability of motorhome and campervan accessible camp sites is required.
- Booking processes should be designed to facilitate the realities of MSV travel. A booking system that enables travellers to book and obtain camping permits on the road is essential. This recommendation recognises that the travel patterns of MSV users preclude the traditional mailed permits system.

Alternative methods utilising the network of accredited visitor information centres and offices of local government may alleviate the problem.

- National Park camping permits that apply to all parks across a state with 3 or 6 month passes as in South Australia and Tasmania are an appropriate system of permitting. CMCA encourages the development of such initiatives as a means of streamlining the permitting system and reducing the red tape for campervan and motorhome travellers. Of particular interest to the CMCA would be the development of an ‘Australia Pass’ to allow campers to travel the nation on a single camping pass. Apart from domestic travellers, such an initiative would provide significant tourism benefits to inbound travellers who are unfamiliar with the myriad of State/Territory park permit systems. An ‘Australia Pass’ would provide a strong marketing tool and encourage regional development.
- Roads and road signage into and around protected areas and associated camping grounds need to be in suitable condition for large vehicles to travel safely. Provision needs to be made for these vehicles to be able to access and navigate these campgrounds and car parks. Information on protected areas that are accessible to motorhomes and campervans needs to be made available in online and brochure information as well as in National Park and road signage.
- Some standardisation of park entry fees and camping costs would improve the budgeting and trip planning abilities of motorhome and campervan travellers. The use of concession passes that cover entry to several parks over a period of time is an attractive model to this segment of travellers.
- MSV users are potentially active contributors to park conservation and park maintenance. Travelling around the nation is a large group of self-contained people who may be very prepared to volunteer their services, or exchange their labour for accommodation in camping grounds. In other cases there may be paid employment available undertaking conservation projects – but delivered by a workforce that is self-contained. Tapping into this potential workforce offers significant benefits in an environment where skill shortages are emerging as a major challenge – particularly in regional Australia.

- end -